

HOW TO HELP SPANISH SPEAKING IMMIGRANTS GET THE BEST EDUCATION FOR THEIR KIDS

(ps these things can help other minority or immigrant students or students from lower socioeconomic/educational backgrounds too)

What Parents Can Do

- Find out the demographics of students in your school district
- Find out the demographics of teachers and administrators in your school district <--you often have to ask for this
- **Is there a huge difference between demographics of your district and demographics of educators?** Ask your superintendent, district diversity officer, or local school administrators what they're ACTIVELY doing to create more opportunities for minority educators.
- Same with standardized tests. **How are minority and lower income students doing on standardized tests in your school/district?** What is your school/district doing to remedy this.
 - **NOTE: QUESTION THE VALIDITY OF THE TESTS THEMSELVES.** Sometimes these tests include presumed knowledge that would be primarily available to upper-middle class students (ex. A question on a math test about enlarging a document on a photocopier that doesn't mention the word proportional...do you know how few American adults even understand how to use a photocopier correctly!?!?! And yet we're asking 6th graders to INTUITIVELY UNDERSTAND that this question is asking about proportionality???)
- Do you have a significant language minority in your area? If so, **are you receiving all school communications in both languages?** If not, ask your school how they're communicating with language minorities. NOTE: They're probably not getting half the info and opportunities.

- **Do you see language minorities waiting for long times or not being served at events/the front desk/pta meetings? OR: Do you see students of immigrants filling out paperwork that normally you would do for your own kid?** Ask your school administration what they're doing to remedy that.
- **For all parents: Does your school communicate the essential skills your kids are learning that year and what parents can do to help? (ex. Establishing a reading/study habit, practicing math skills or vocab skills).**
 - If you're not being taught how to best help your student thrive, neither are immigrant language minorities who have the added challenge of not growing up in US school systems and not realizing that their kids might be more successful if they can help them with a few more things. REMEMBER: many immigrants are raising kids without the help of their parents. And they might not remember how much their parents participated in their own educational experiences.

What Educators Can Do

- **Empower parents to be involved in their children's education**
 - Many immigrants feel lost in American systems (if you've ever lived overseas...you know this isn't even just about language).
 - Help immigrant parents know what resources are available to them
- **ACTIVELY LOOK FOR WHO IS BEING LEFT OUT**
 - This should be YOUR MAIN GOAL as an educator.
 - Culture and language aren't the only barriers for people. Disability, socioeconomic class, shame about their educational achievements or marital status, etc. can be

factors for lower parental involvement as well. Being aware of who your non-involved parents are and figuring out if you can ease any of the barriers to their participation is the best way to build a partnership with parents. And parents who partner have children who witness that partnership...so it makes your job easier.

- When parents aren't involved...it means students are taking on more of the burden for reaching their educational goals.
- **Bilingual communication ALWAYS**
 - Most bilingual students are more fluent in English than in Spanish after third grade. That means that they won't fully understand communications sent in Spanish and they won't necessarily have the words to translate to their parents from English into Spanish.
 - Don't have language support? Copy and paste into **google translate** and find someone who is bilingual to check if it's ok. **NOTE:** American bilingual kids often don't learn native-level expressions and so it's better if you can find an adult in your community with conversational english and native Spanish (or other language) skills.
- **Work with parents and students to create events celebrating their culture.**
 - To do this, you have to establish trust and relationship with parents. Ask what THEY would like to do to share their culture (food is often an easy one but it could be things like dance or a specific cultural celebration. FYI...cinco de mayo ISN'T a common celebration among most hispanic immigrants)
- **Once you've established trust, help parents understand essential educational skills that will help their children succeed.** Example: practicing multiplication tables (or grade

level appropriate skills). Establishing regular study times. A quiet, distraction free space to study (ie...take away the phone during study time). *Don't assume what's obvious to you is obvious to someone from a completely different cultural and educational experience.*

- **Find the simplest most effective way to communicate with your target audience**

- For many hispanic immigrants, that's fb/whatsapp/text. How to figure out? 1) ask 2) think about what they're most likely to use in their work or religious/community organization environment.
- Don't be afraid to share a video of how to use communication tools. You can create it once in LOOM and send it out.

- **Make sure you have a list of ALL communications that are sent out. And make sure parents have easy access to sign up for those lists**

- Easy way to do this:
 - create a webpage that links directly to sign up forms
 - create a sign-up sheet during class registration/open house OR have ipads ready for parents to sign themselves up
 - create a one-sheet for parents to take with them with bit.ly links (or short urls) that they can type in.
- NOTE: Just telling parents a list/newsletter exists doesn't communicate how they can get on that list

- **Communicate all the details and don't rush parents to make decisions before you've communicated the details**

(psst...this helps ALL parents and saves you time)

- Step 1: Consider your audience. What is important to them?
- Step 2: Get all the details
- Details include:

- **Who this applies to: what grades? Is it specifically for a certain demographic/eligibility? Is it for students or parents? PUT THIS UP FRONT AND IN BOLD TO SAVE PARENTS TIME.**
- *What is it?*
 - What's it called. If it has a fancy name, explain what it is.
- *Where?*
 - Location(s). If there's a specific room list it. Or if there's going to be signs pointing them in the right direction, tell them what they're looking for.
- *When?*
 - There are "save the dates" and "invitations." If you're asking parents to mark off a date 3 months in advance you can just put the date.
 - *****If you're asking for an immediate decision or a decision about something less than 6 weeks into the future, you need DATE & TIME/TIME COMMITMENT.**
 - Also...are you expecting parents to take time off of work to be there?
 - For ongoing commitments (like sport or clubs): the length of the season (from what date to what date?), what time (start and end time), number of meetings per week, approximate number of games/meets/special events per season and when do they occur (for example, do they have games mostly on thursdays evenings and saturday mornings with a few exceptions?)
- *Why should I care?*
 - For students: is it a fun activity? Will it help them get into college or career (older kids)? Is it a fun way for them to get more fit/be happier/etc?

- For parents: Explain the VALUE. Don't assume that parents understand things like the importance of test scores, what the SAT/ACTs are, how extracurriculars affect college admissions, or how social activities enhance student wellbeing.
 - *How Much?*
 - Does it cost anything?
 - Is this a necessary or a "nice to have" purchase?
 - **Are there scholarships available? (If so, try to make the LEAST AMOUNT OF PAPERWORK POSSIBLE AND create a common form they can use multiple times through the year...low income parents have to fill out all the same applications as the rest of the kids PLUS complex and detailed financials on a regular basis. Meaning: you're robbing them of time they could be earning money)**
 - Contact info for more questions. ***Email is helpful but a phone number to text is better.
 - Why? Many language minority immigrants work in non-office jobs and are more comfortable using apps like facebook, whatsapp, or texts
 - Also, if they struggle with communicating in English, they can copy and paste from Google translate. Note: this is imperfect and often depends significantly on the language proficiency in their native language...which...can sometimes be very low. BUT google translate has the added bonus of having some speech-to-text capability.
- **Recognize that not all Spanish speakers actually read and write Spanish**
 - Some might only have a 6th grade education, if that.
 - For some...it's not even their first language.

- **Understand that words don't always mean the same thing to everyone**

- For example, when Spanish speakers are talking about wanting an educator who understands “diversity” they’re often referring to their own communities...where they have to navigate a ton of cross-cultural and language differences everyday. Having someone realize that not all immigrants have the same experience is important.
 - Ex. Mexicans, Hondurans, Cubans, and Costa Ricans, Colombians, Salvadorans have very different cultural traditions. They get lumped together as “spanish-speaking immigrant” or “hispanic” even when their experiences vary.
- Words mean different things from country to country and can cause confusion in translation.
- Also, because different countries have different customs, sometimes there will be social mistakes and misunderstandings between hispanics from different countries or even different regions where power has been unequally distributed for centuries.